

VZCZCXRO2800
PP RUEHDE
DE RUEHAD #3434/01 2401234
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 281234Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6725
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1100

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 003434

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP; NEA/PPD
LONDON FOR MOC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [TC](#)

SUBJECT: US BLASTED IN MEDIA OVER UAE PHD STUDENT'S DETENTION AT
LOS ANGELES AIRPORT

¶1. The detention of UAE PhD student Saif Al Sha'ali at Los Angeles Airport on August 21, 2006, has been extensively covered in daily, mostly front page articles in English and Arabic UAE print media August 24-28 which have frequently characterized the incident as one of racial/ethnic "profiling."

¶2. Representative headlines:

"Victim of racial profiling will never return to US. UAE National will enroll for doctorate in any other country,"
Dubai-based English daily "Gulf News" (circ 95,000), 08/26.

"Saif Al-Shaali returns to UAE after getting detained for 29 hours in the US," Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circ 85,000), 08/26.

"Govt urged to send nationals to non-US universities for studies,"
Dubai-based English daily "Khaleej Times" (circ 80,000), 08/28.

¶3. Following articles are representative of coverage in English and Arabic press.

¶4. An 8/25 article in Sharjah-based Arabic daily "Al Khaleej" (circ 90,000) under the headline: "UAE follows up with the case of the UAE student Al-Shaali and calls for respecting the principle of reciprocal treatment":

"Concerned agencies in the UAE followed up with great concern the case of the 26 year old UAE student Saif Khalifa Al-Shaali who was continuing his PhD at an American university and detained this Wednesday morning at Los Angeles International airport for 26 hours because of certain suspicions which caused the cancellation of his visa."

"An official source said to Al-Khaleej: 'The UAE expects the United States, along with other countries who share distinctive bilateral relations, to apply the principle of reciprocity given that our country is open to the world... and warmly and respectfully receives its visitors based on its balanced foreign policies and its belief in the ideas of communication and cooperation among peoples... The UAE renounces terrorism, was one of the first countries which declared its position of rejecting terrorism, and took the initiative to develop legislation to criminalize and confront it...'"

"He also added: 'There was a meeting that brought together a senior official at the UAE embassy and an official at the U.S. State Department wherein the latter apologized, expressing his interest in this topic and referring the cause of it to 'the imperatives of modernizing the immigration system.' The latter speaker also asked the American embassy in Abu Dhabi to fully cooperate with the student Al-Shaali in the UAE to obtain a new visa.'"

"While the source appreciated these endeavors, he expressed his

surprise at what had happened because Al-Shaali was a student who had been studying in the United States for the past five years during which he had traveled regularly... 'When we asked the U.S. State Department to give us an explanation, they said that the student Al-Shaali chose to return to his country voluntarily, yet our initial information confirms that while his first choice was to return to UAE, his only other alternative was to continue staying at the detention center.'

15. An 8/27 article in Sharjah-based Arabic daily "Al Khaleej" (circ 90,000) under the headline: "Student Saif Al-Shaali in an interview with Al-Khaleej: "The apology of the embassy is not sufficient":

"Al-Khaleej" met with Al-Shaali's family. At the outset, the student expressed his regret to what had happened saying that he did not expect any problem because he had entered the United States eight times carrying the same papers without any problems. He said that he had lost confidence in the American system and will not consider returning there. He plans to complete his post-graduate studies somewhere else in the world where human values are respected irrespective of origin or race."

"He also said that a representative from the university will visit the American embassy in the UAE to file a formal complaint about what had happened. He added that he learned that the American embassy had verbally apologized and that embassy officials asked him to apply for a visa in order to resume his studies, yet he does not consider this as sufficient and that he is determined to never again go to the United States."

(Note: Embassy has not apologized to nor had any contact with the Al Shaali family. End note.)

"However, he praised the good qualities of the American people and the high-level of cooperation from his professors during his studies

ABU DHABI 00003434 002 OF 002

at the American university. However, he regrets that the U.S. government has placed obstacles in front of Arab students, deliberately humiliating them and treating them like criminals in the framework of its campaign against the so-called terrorism."

"He stressed the importance of having more security guarantees to protect all the students who go to study in the United States, so they would not have the same problem he had at the airport in Los Angeles."

"Dr. Khalifa Al-Shaali, the father of the student, called for the need to look at the incident from an educational perspective, reflecting on the future of hundreds of students who travel to the US to study and obtain degrees from the universities, yet are exposed to insults and arrest, beatings and illogical security investigations. He also thinks that the Ministry of Education must move in the direction of providing alternatives for students who wish to complete their higher education and search for alternative scientific disciplines at the same outstanding level in other safer countries that are more respectful towards Arab students..."

16. An 8/28 article in Dubai-based English daily "Khaleej Times" (circ 80,000) under the headline: "Govt urged to send nationals to non-US universities for studies":

"'Meritorious UAE nationals should be given scholarships to pursue studies in universities outside the US,' says Saif Al Shaali, the latest victim of racial profiling by American authorities."

"Apart from US universities, we should enjoy the option to study in universities in UK and the Continent," he said. 'I didn't have a choice except to go to the US, because the UAE government's scholarship policy is heavily tilted in favor of the US.'"

"Al Shaali, who returned to Dubai along with his wife and three children on Friday (August 25) after a 26-hour ordeal at Los Angeles International Airport and cancellation of US residence visa said, 'under the emerging anti-Muslim backlash in the US, UAE students should be given a choice of university and country.'"

"'On the one hand, the UAE government should review its choice of country under the scholarship policy, and on the other hand, the US government should treat people of ethnic backgrounds with dignity and respect,' states Al Shaali."

"He pointed out that students traveling to the US to pursue higher education hail from affluent families and should therefore not be treated like criminals and terrorists because of their Middle Eastern descent. He noted that a couple of his friends from other Gulf countries who traveled with their wives and children to the US have also become victims of racial profiling in the US."

"Tightening up of security measures and 'special registration' desks at US airports is acceptable in the interest of America's national security especially after 9/11. But, a population of around 1.2 billion Muslims around the world should not be victimized for a handful of Muslims involved in the September 11 attacks in the US and the recent bomb threats at UK airports. The US authorities should at least explain to the victims of racial profiling and those held in detention on 'undisclosed suspicion,' the reasons for doing so. Otherwise, it is a sheer violation of human rights."

QUINN